

Squirrels, Chipmunks Becoming as Common as Island's Tourists

The other day I was talking to a friend, who mentioned that this year there seemed to be an inordinately large number of squirrels, both red and gray, and Eastern chipmunks. There are lots of squirrels and chipmunks visible around town and in the woods. In part, it might be because of the dry year, which has caused the undergrowth to be thinner and so you can see more clearly through the woods, but I think that this is only part of the story.

Most people probably readily recognize these furry creatures. The Eastern gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) is about 17 to 20 inches long, with a tail that is about half its total length. Generally the squirrel has a distinct grayish cast caused by silvery tips on the hairs. Underparts are yellowish white and the tail is bushy. There is a white eye ring and white patch behind each ear. On the Island and in the Great Lakes region, it's not uncommon to see a melanistic phase of the gray squirrel that appears almost totally black and is often referred to as a "black squirrel," though species-wise, it's still a gray.

The red squirrel, sometimes called the pine squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), is



Squirrel

about a third smaller than the gray, with a total length of 11 to 14 inches and a tail length of four to 5.25 inches. It only weighs about a quarter to half a pound. In the summer, this squirrel has a dorsal band of pale reddish gray to reddish brown hair running along the back, from its head to the tip of its tail. The sides appear olive gray and are separated from its whitish underbelly by a narrow black line. There is a white ring around the eye. In the winter, the reddish back is brighter, although the black side line is less distinct.

The Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) is the smallest of this trio, being less than 10 inches in total length with a tail about 2.6 to 4.3 inches long, and weighing in at 2.5 to four ounces. The back of the chipmunk is grayish brown to reddish brown with an obvious red patch on the rump. Its underparts are white and there are five dark strips along the back and sides. The longest of these



Chipmunk

runs down the midline. Between the paired dark lateral stripes is a narrow band of white.

Squirrels and chipmunks are rodents, with the typical pair of large, curving incisors and the upper and lower jaws, and a sizable gap between the incisors and the cheek teeth. The incisors continue to grow throughout the rodent's life and they're constantly sharpened by gnawing. The front of the incisors is coated with orange enamel and the rear is softer dentine. This allows the teeth to be continually sharpened to a chisel-like edge.

As with many mammals, the size of the population is



Nature Notes

By Patricia Martin



dependent on food availability, predation, and the severity of the winter. The last few years, winters have been mild and the food has been in good supply. Normally the gray squirrel and the Eastern chipmunk produce two litters of young each year, the first in the early spring and the other in midsummer. The litters consist of usually two to four or five young. Red squirrels, on the other hand, if they're living in the north, usually produce only one litter and

skip the midsummer litter. Recently, a study done by Michigan State Professor Andrew McAdams showed an interesting relationship between the production of cones on spruce trees and the number of litters of red squirrels produced.

Spruce trees have evolved a phenomenon called "masting." In most years, the trees will only produce a few cones, making food in short supply for

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NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE ON MACKINAC ISLAND

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summer cottager Dottie Sharer, who has just arrived from her home in Bloomfield Hills. Dottie loves Mackinac, and has many friends who are pleased to see her back on the Island.

Dr. Helen Straus of Chicago, Illinois, and her brother, Frank, from Springfield, Illinois, recently enjoyed spending time on Mackinac. Their parents, Lorna and Dr. Fran, departed for Germany Monday, where they will attend a family reunion of the Puttkammers. Enjoy your trip.

Jamie Bynoe had a great trip Thursday to Detroit to attend the baseball game between the Detroit Tigers and the Cleveland Indians. He was joined by his cousin, Jordon Groseclose, as well as Austin Davis and Craig Skuft. The Tigers won, and Jamie came home with a lot of treasures.

Bob Benser's two daughters, Leslie and Amy, with their families, have spent the past two

weeks on Mackinac. They had a wonderful time at the Fourth of July games on Windermere Point. It was great to see Gracie Irish, Amy's daughter, who is recovering from leukemia. She is doing very well. Uncle Bobby was thrilled to have his nieces and nephews on the Island.

Deana and Glenn St. Onge of Remus spent the Fourth of July on the Island visiting their son, Jason, and friends.

The Dennis Brodeur family from Traverse City spent the holiday weekend on the Island visiting his mother, Loretta, and Tony Spata. They all had fun at the Fourth of July games on Windermere Point.

This will be a very busy week coming up, as the Chicago fleet of sailboats will leave Saturday, July 14, bound for the finish line at Mackinac, which is the old Round Island Lighthouse. Best of luck to all the happy sailors. Lloyd Karzen arrived Wednesday to prepare for the race. We look forward to watching for the spinnakers in

the west.

Happy birthday to Patty Schoenborn July 19. I'm sure that Lily will help you blow your candles out.

Sunday evening, July 8, the Island and surrounding areas experienced strong thunder, lightning, and high winds. Fortunately, it wasn't as severe as expected. We needed the rain, as our lawns were beginning to turn brown.

We send special birthday wishes July 21 to Pam St. Onge of St. Ignace. Island friends send best wishes.

Cyndi and Skip Kutsop and family of Mountainside, New Jersey, are enjoying a vacation at their Ship Watch condominium in the Mission.

A very happy birthday July 21 to Brenda Bunker and Paul Wandrie Sr. Have a wonderful day.

Andrew and Millicent Reynolds of Washington, D.C., were guests of the Reverend Vince and Molly Carroll this past week. Andy is Deputy Science Advisor to the Secretary of State. During their stay, Andy spoke to Little Stone Church's men's breakfast about global technology issues. The Reynolds have been searching for a retirement property in Petoskey.

Enjoy the beautiful summer evenings!

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